

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

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London's first edition.]

GERMANY UNDER THE FRENCH SCALPEL.
SIGNE METTRIE. Mme Bertholdine, Par Philippe Daryl. Paris: J. Helzel et Cie.

The author of "Public Life in England" has taken up a subject which few Frenchmen of the present day can treat dispassionately, and which offers strong temptation to critics whose prepossessions are naturally anything but sympathetic. The opportunity to avenge Soden by holding up to ridicule and censure the foibles of Germany, by making all her weak points prominent, and emphasizing the worst features of her social life, could, however, only have been utilized by a writer who had carefully studied the whole subject, and who was therefore in a position to give point to his most merciless criticisms by preserving an appearance of fidelity in description. M. Daryl has evidently prepared himself thus. He knows his Berlin, and he has therefore been able to present a series of pictures which, though saturated with prejudice and National hatred, are in some respects truthful portraiture in their main features. He has cast his views of Berlin manners in the form of a story, with considerable skill. The plot is little more than a thread upon which hang the descriptions of German social life. A beautiful young Danish girl, left an orphan with no other possession than a valuable antiquarian collection made by her father, who was a celebrated archaeologist, goes to Berlin to endeavor to sell it to the Government. She enters the family of a middle-class officer, as a boarder, and her experiences there proceed naturally.

The key-note is struck in the first sentences of the book. Signe Mettrie, the heroine, is approaching Berlin by the railway. The express train is travelling over the plains of Brandenburg:

"It is a lovely day. Not a cloud obscures the rays of the April sun which vauntly expends his warmth upon the barren Prussian soil. And this bright sunlight, throwing into relief all the outlines of the flat country, exposes its poverty plainly. For it reveals a kingdom of hunger, or a trifled field of military manoeuvres, sterile and wasted for ages. The people recognize one another, saints, form noisy groups. The scene resembles that of an open air concert in a large country town. As everywhere in Berlin, the military uniform dominates and takes the pretensions. But all society is represented; the court shows the city, and so by side with the citizens flanked by her daughters may be seen the professional beauties whose photographs are shamelessly offered for sale by the newsmen of the Unter den Linden."

Signe is watching the depressing landscape when, at Nauen, three German men of business enter the carriage. They at once begin to smoke and spit, talk loud, shout at one another, and compel Signe finally to open the window. Then one addresses her, and puffs Berlin. It is a great city. "It is making wonderful progress. Soon it will leave Paris and London behind, and become necessarily the capital of the continent. It intersects the two central routes of Europe—from Stettin to Leipzig and from Hamburg to Breslau. Against such natural advantages contention is useless."

But at Spandau a young lieutenant of the guards enters, and "at his entrance the citizens humbly moved so as to leave him the corner seats. Without noticing this courtesy he accepted it as his right, took his place, stretched out his legs on the cushions, and, taking a mirror from his pocket, and a small brush, began coolly to arrange his hair and beard. Silence now prevailed. The helmet which encircled the lieutenant's brow seemed in their eyes to emit the rays of an aurora."

This lieutenant is a Von Giesecke, of noble blood, who has the Iron Cross, which he won in the following irregular manner one night at the opera: "He was brushed against in passing by a gentleman in plain clothes who failed to beg his pardon. Freuden von Giesecke brutally demanded an apology. The other having retorted with considerable asperity, the Lieutenant drew his sword and ran him through the body, and he died in an hour. The affair made much noise. The liberal journals insinuated that it was a simple assassination. But *The North German Gazette* hastened to reply boldly that the Lieutenant von Giesecke had acted within his right and his duty; that according to military law officers gravely compare notes as to how many hard-boiled eggs they can dispose of at a meal. Others talk of smoked meats, Pomeraniana goose Westphalia ham and so forth. In short their topics are coarse, sensual and heavy.

An illustration of the military despotism which obtains at Berlin, the Lieutenant von Giesecke is represented as ordering his orderly drawn to go and substitute himself for the sweethearts of the Pflugge's servant, Lima, in order that he may report to the physician for this piece of money to a woman the very first time I dine with the military without hearing talk about women and horses. It is twenty years since I made this vow, but I have not yet been called upon to bestow my freedom in arms." (London Times.)

The habits of the Casino, however, in this case do talk of something else, namely, eating. Old officers gravely compare notes as to how many hard-boiled eggs they can dispose of at a meal. Others talk of smoked meats, Pomeraniana goose Westphalia ham and so forth. In short their topics are coarse, sensual and heavy.

In the same line is an account of a ball where Signe is present, and to which Von Giesecke comes in quest of her. Before his advent a number of civilians, or "laics" as the officers call them, had been surrounding and paying their court to the beautiful stranger, but, "his entrance caused a sensation. The unhappy, 'laics' with their sad black coats, their insignificant figures and their plebeian names, did not even make a pretence of resistance. This class of beings counted for nothing with him. He marched arrogantly through the room, went straight to Signe, without paying any attention to the citizens who fluttered round her, and bore her off triumphantly to the quadrille."

In the streets the view was not livelier. In the new streets, paved with wood, were some pretentious mansions. Elsewhere the houses were low and frowzy-looking, while many of the shops and some even of the dwellings were below the street level. Dogs with hanging tongues drew little carts. Wagons of mutton dispensed their odors. Sewers scarcely covered smelled aloud to heaven. There were no street cries, no signs of life or gayety in the thoroughfares. Signe observed that all the women were rouged, and nearly everybody wore eye glasses. An intolerable smell of sauerkraut compelled her to employ her visagiste continually. At last she arrives at her destination, and finds herself in an incredibly vulgar and coarse family. The daughter, Helmine, "had upon her head one of those wonderful structures of chestnut hair which one only sees now in collections of old fashion journals. The costume of the pair belonged to no definite epoch. It was composed of unknown material, of colors at once meaningless and loud, of foul trimmings which defied description."

They are about to eat a meal of coffee and rye-bread and butter. They are always eating or telling about eating. In the evening Helmine's sweetheart comes but they had supper.

It consisted of bread and butter, slices of ham, and gravy, traces of four or five other kinds bordered a kind of promenade marked out by an iron fence. At the sides, a walk having on the left a track where three horses could pass abreast, and on the right a carriage-way. Some decent shops, drugstores and confectioners, however, were to be seen. The horses were well dressed, the horsemen of two or three who were poorly dressed foot-passengers; few or no soldiers; all the known varieties of military uniform under a swarm of "pinkiehannes" and regulation helmets; this is what Signe saw in Berlin.

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This mode of love-making by advertisement may be common in Germany, but in this particular case it was not altogether satisfactory, since the faithless Gustav, finding that Signe's inheritance was worth a great deal more than Helmine's dowry, promptly deserts his original lady-love, and lays siege to the young Dane in the most unabashed and business-like way.

She feared they would suffocate. They on their part were concerned because she did not eat like them. "They talked about cooking. The hostess entered into endless details about the 'fat,' the 'sour' and the 'sweet,' which form the three grand divisions of the German *cuisine*."

From eating the talk suddenly passed to Goethe and Schiller, and here it became evident that they had read and reflected a good deal. Presently Helmine's sweetheart comes in, and her first question to him is, "What did you have for supper?" The next is as to his dinner bill of fare, and all listen with great interest, while he informs them that he had "Farina soup, cabbage with lard, smoked herring, pork ragout, roast venison, fried meat balls, cheese and apples." Then follows a solemn discussion on pork ragout, and Helmine triumphantly observes that she will bring her future husband her mother's recipe for making the dish.

Meantime Helmine and Gustav Lindermann, her betrothed, are careening one another in the most open and unembarrassed way. She takes her seat upon his knees, and they hug one another freely, to the amazement of the young Dane. But presently music is called for, and then another phase of the German character, as seen through French spectacles, is exhibited. One plays the flute, another the violin, a third the bass-viol, a fourth the piano, and they all play well; as well that Signe had never heard chamber music so sweetly rendered. When she retires to her bare and poorly furnished chamber, and bestows herself in her narrow

and short bed—so short that she concludes the Germans must have the habit of rolling themselves up when they sleep—she naturally meditates upon the strange contrasts and contradictions she has encountered:

Singular people, these Germans. They appear to take as much pains to make life odious as others do to smooth it. How do they have beds in which one cannot lie full length? Why these hideous wall-paintings, which give one the nightmare? Why Goethe and Schiller seem with greater gravity? Why these stately trees, with silvery leaves, this sharp smell, these superannuated cabes, these fairairaces, these pompous titles, this exquisite music? and these manners of a griseette! Did all the Berlin ladies spend their time like Helmine, in writing stockings and discussing the guinea bill of fare?

The next day is Sunday, when all the servants have holiday with their soldier lovers, and when the citizens consequently dine in the various beer gardens or in the pride of Berlin, the famous Thingarten. The Pflugges take Signe to this latter resort. This says M. Daryl, "is the glorified paradise of Berlin, the rendezvous of all its elegancies." For all the middle-class citizens to eat a fifty cent dinner on the terrace of the knoll, in the company of a thousand holiday-makers, represents the last word of luxury and human felicity.

What Signe saw, however, was "some trees covered with dust, a piece of stagnant water, and behind a line of statues and parterres, some groves, where a full army corps seemed to have appointments with twelve or fifteen hundred nurse girls."

As she is not sufficiently inspired (owing apparently to her want of *genius*) they take her to the crown and centre of the Thingarten, namely the Zoological Garden.

It is the fashion to go there about 3 o'clock, to take a dust-bath. An orchestra plays daily to the lake, and the carriages converge after dinner, and make a few turns. The people descend and join the crowd, which sways and swings about, and presently seeks seats and refreshments. All Berlin is there, the women, over-dressed, with gaudy ribbons and cheap trimmings, yellow bows, immense hoop skirts, false hair and false bonnets; the men in walking clothes cut away, but above all, in most cases, form noisy groups. The scene resembles that of an open air concert in a large country town. As everywhere in Berlin, the military uniform dominates and takes the pretensions. But all society is represented; the court shows the city, and so by side with the citizens flanked by her daughters may be seen the professional beauties whose photographs are shamelessly offered for sale by the newsmen of the Unter den Linden.

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We must omit an amusing description of a Berlin weiss-bier cellar, and proceed to a sketch of the Casino, where the army officers, diplomats and nobles generally congregate, and where of course the society is very exclusive.

As usual the company was large. There were digests of the news, and a history of the life of the Emperor. They drank their wine without a murmur, and gaudily buttoned under his chin. Or Prince Bismarck gets off his horse, or old Moltke passes by on his, carrying always in his heart a lament for his dead young wife. "There are few honest men and no horsewomen. Riding is one of the exercises the Berliners forbid to their sex, as incompatible with the feminine virtues. It is quite proper to allow every kind of conjugal and extra-conjugal freedom to be taken in public, but it is a deadly sin for a woman to wear riding trousers."

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